

Government Orders

system, but at some point in time, it becomes the duty of parliamentarians to respect that broader public interest.

We have to put aside errors in judgment or otherwise of the past. We cannot assess fault. We have to deal with the realities of the situation. We cannot have our ships on the high seas unprotected. We cannot have ships tied up. We cannot have veterans, deserving of care, not receiving that care.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to Bill C-49, legislation which forces two groups in the Public Service to go back to work.

First, I would like to comment on what the hon. member who spoke earlier said about language. I am sure he is more knowledgeable than I am about the English language, but I think the hon. member should understand why people want to make Canada's statutes gender-neutral. If we have a group of people, in this case Canadian women, who feel unfairly treated because of language, I think we have a moral obligation to take the time to make these changes. The hon. member talked about making changes, in French or English, to make all Canadians feel at home in this country. The hon. member who spoke earlier said in this respect that it was a lot of trouble and that it would be a full-time job to make all these changes. A change for the better is never too much trouble. These are things that have to be done.

We are equal in this country. We are all equal. Men are not more important than women, and vice versa, and if we are in a situation where we use language that will offend one group, we must change the words we use.

To get back to Bill C-49, the back to work legislation—the previous speaker is from Halifax on the east coast. I fail to understand why he refuses to stick up for his own people. It seems seamen in eastern Canada are paid less than those on the Pacific coast. It is like saying that lumberjacks from one community are to be paid less than lumberjacks from another community. I don't understand that. Do they do the same work? Do they work for the same employer? Is the Atlantic Ocean easier to sail than the Pacific? Maybe someone could explain why one is more difficult than the other. If there

is no difference, if the same kind of work is involved, why don't these people get the same salary? I don't blame seamen on the east coast for wanting to be paid the same as seamen on the west coast. I am told that on the west coast, seamen are prepared to accept a lower wage increase to compensate for what the seamen on the east coast will get. I think that shows the seamen with the Coast Guard in British Columbia have heart.

The words "emergency" and "safety" were mentioned, and the fact that a few days ago, the Coast Guard was needed in an emergency. Coast Guard employees were at their place of work, with their picket signs. It didn't take 35 minutes or an hour or two hours to find them. They were right there, in front of their place of work. It seems they were at sea 20 minutes. They did their job. That is really fantastic. We have a group that is walking the picket line, that is on strike, but when lives must be saved, whether they are Canadian or foreign lives, they are concerned, they take their work seriously and get on the job when people's safety is at stake.

• (1630)

When we talk about the people who work in our hospital services, I think they are right to ask for fair wages. I think it is horrifying and even immoral to see a woman working in one hospital and a man who does the same work in another building, two miles away or three or four kilometres away, and earns up to 40 per cent more. This is really beyond me. Are people paid on the basis of gender or are they paid for what they do?

I fail to understand the hon. member for Halifax West who is so concerned about gender in the legislation where it concerns the Public Service. He even goes so far as to tolerate the fact that women are paid less than men and that if women work in a field where they readily encounter the kind of attitude I just heard described—I don't think that's fair. I think it is heartless and shows a lack of responsibility.

It seems that the men and women employed in hospital services are at the bottom of the wage scale in this country. Well, when we are sick—maybe government members should be sick enough to go to a hospital where they could put their stupid arguments to the people who look after them and care for them. I wonder how they would feel then!